WHIRRAKEE

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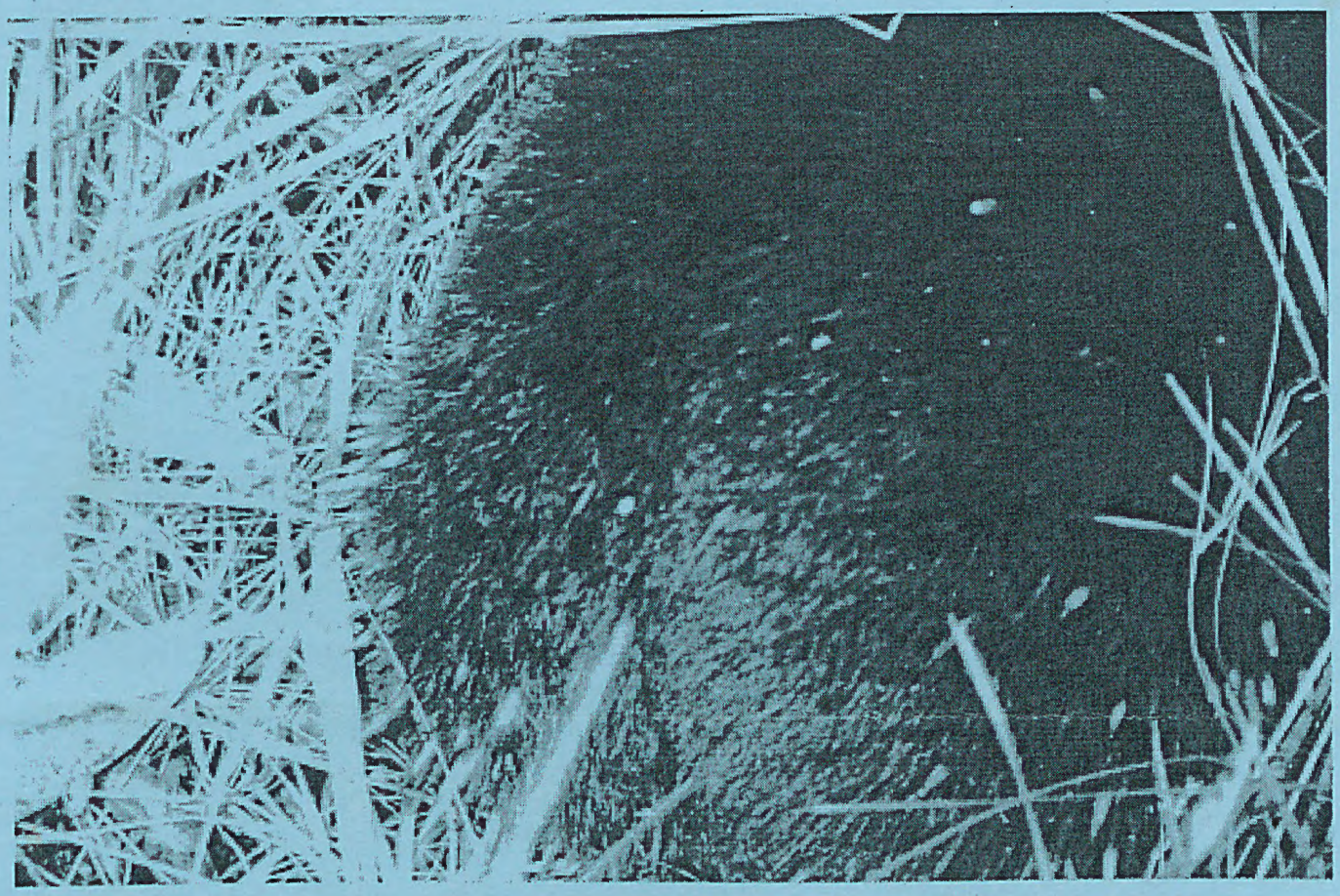

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2002 - 2003

President	Rob Moors	Mandurang South Rd.	5439 6254
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Junior Vice President	position not filled		
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		e-mail: s.wilkens@bendigo.latrobe.edu.au	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34. These rates include GST.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members:
Barbara Pelczynska, Bob Ruddick, Maurie Stone, Stuart Fraser.

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has two active sub-groups:

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizen Building.

Front Cover: Photographer: Clive Fisher
What is this? It looks like hairy bottom? Find out on page 3

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 24, No. 3, April 2003

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
Congratulations to Rod Orr for finalising this year's speaker syllabus. If all the speakers are as inspiring as Paul Haw who spoke at the March general meeting, we are in for a good year. Having once organised a speaker syllabus myself elsewhere, I can appreciate the pain that goes into getting it finalised. Please support the club (and the moral of outside speakers who come, often from a long way away), by turning up for those meetings.
There was a bit of confusion when the 'normal', general meetings actually start. I have added a note to the top of page 10 and this should clarify it. As far as I know, so far no workshops have been planned for this year, but if you have an idea for one, don't let this fact put you off. Let the committee know about it. As long as the information can be distributed via the 'Whirrakee' we can make changes to the program any time...
Lastly, as you'll see, there is quite a bit of 'white space' in this edition. We are a bit short of written contributions....

A Tasmanian observation

Author: Clive Fisher

Date: 23-09-02

Place: Adventure Bay, Bruny Island, Tasmania

Time: Around Midday

Happening: An echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) swaggered across the road from my right to my left. I got out of my car with my camera and was able to take several photographs of it. I noticed that its back was covered with thick, long, brown hair through which the tips of a few widely-spaced spines were protruding. The other thing I noticed was its white beak. I could see this, because it did not pull its head in, but was looking around all the time. All the other echidnas I have seen had a dark-grey, almost black beak.

I have observed another echidna on the Overland Track in Tasmania and it seemed little different from mainland echidnas.

I suppose the Bruny Island echidnas have been isolated from other Tasmanian echidnas for many thousands of years, and so have evolved differently.

Incidentally, one of the first echidna specimens was taken from Adventure Bay in 1792. As Bruni D'Entrecasteaux spent time there in that year, it was probably his expedition that collected it.

A hairy echidna from Bruny Island
Photographer: Clive Fisher

March General Meeting - Speaker Paul Haw: "What have we learnt from the drought?"

Author: Sabine Wilkens

Paul Haw runs a nursery at Yando near Boort, where he raises plants mainly for use by farmers who are involved in revegetation. It is amazing that he has time to do this, with all the other activities he is involved in. Paul is restoring a piece of Black Box country and this covenant-protected property alone must keep him very busy... His trees are close to 800 years old and he figures that in this extreme of climate, we should be able to learn something about the

general ecology of such woodlands. In fact, considering the whole ecology of the region is what makes any agriculture successful. This is not done very often and, as a result, agriculture suffers heavy losses in extreme weather as we are experiencing at present. So the key to sustainable farming is to consider all the ecological relationships, not just those of the crop plants. Practices like corridor farming, using water plants to absorb surplus water from community drains and planting salt bush are just a few that make perfect sense but that are not part of traditional farming methods. Another practice strictly pursued on Paul's property is to leave fallen wood lying around (rather than gathering it for firewood) to help the local goanna population amongst other animals. How? The wood provides food for termites and the goannas can lay their eggs in the termite nests....all is connected.

The health of regional wetlands and waterways are a big concern for Paul. He is involved in a restoration project at Hird Swamp, just one of the many wetlands in the region. Many thousands of rushes needed planting and many things can go wrong. But far from despairing when this happens, Paul believes, as there are so many wetlands which need restoring, a mistake in one can only lead to better restoration practices in the next one. Many of these wetlands rely on a wetting/drying cycle and the plants and animals that used to live there were adapted to this. With some wetlands now permanently wet, they resemble aquatic deserts rather than living wetlands.

That Paul's methods have achieved results is evident by the number of visitors his property has every week. At least two bus loads come and tour the property to learn first hand what Paul has to say.
He believes the key to learning something about sustainable farming is by education through demonstration. Ten years ago, he was involved in producing the *Environmental Handbook*, a 'cookbook' on how to run a farm in a sustainable manner e.g. how to kill foxes, how to fence a river etc., just the sort of information farmers need who buy or inherit a property but no instruction book with it.
More education needs to be done, and very importantly, local farmers need to work in with local enterprises. For example the large Boort olive farm has many conditions placed upon its operation which will benefit the environment, e.g. regularly pull up wild olives, fence remnant bushland, do not use flood irrigation and minimise chemical treatments etc.

So..... to answer to the question, what have we learnt from the drought.... From reading his father's diary and other historical documents, Paul believes we have not learnt very much. However, at the same time he is convinced that we have here an excellent opportunity to start learning right now and make up for lost time.

This was a very inspiring talk and question time had to be cut short to save Paul's voice. One interesting comment from the audience was about the merit of conserving goannas when they are well-known egg thieves and thus threaten the survival of certain birds. Have a guess at Paul's response to this and then turn to the bottom of page 10.

Editor's note: Stan Pelczynski has recently given me two articles that fit here in this context...

1. 'Snipes have bird lovers all aflutter'

This article by Melissa Fyfe (2003) reported on the search for the Australian Painted Snipe. A weekend in late January saw 150 bird lovers search for the rare bird across the nation's wetlands. Bird Australia's Chris Tzaros (well known to many members) was quoted as saying that this species is "one of the finest looking wading birds in the nation". This species has, in fact, the same mating system described by Tom Burton for the Argentinian Jacanas (see page 6 in this edition), where the female mates with many males and leaves them to incubate the eggs and raise the chicks.
Five birds had previously been spotted in Hird Swamp (mentioned above in the report on Paul's work to restore this wetland), news that had thrilled the bird world of Australia. According to the article, some enthusiasts had come down from Broome to see these birds. On that weekend in late January then, seven more birds were seen at Hird Swamp.
According to the author, biologists believe that the snipe's decline is caused by the diversion of water from wetland and rivers to farming irrigation. Listening to Paul's talk, it is not just biologists who believe this. Let's hope the restoration of Hird Swamp is going from strength to strength....

Reference: Fyfe, M. (2003) Snipe have bird lovers all aflutter. *The Age* 21-1-03: p.8

2. Drought - evidence of global warming?

While some people believe that floods and droughts are part of the normal Australian environmental conditions and that plants and animals are adapted to it, others are saying that this present drought is unusual. An article in the Australian by Amanda Hodge and Leigh Dayton (2003) tells about a report commissioned by the WWF which has warned that the 2002 drought is the first clear evidence that global warming is creating a hotter, drier environment. The report claims that higher than average temperatures had caused an increase in evaporation and thus more rapid drying in soil, vegetation and water courses.

The authors were reported as stating: "We're not trying to say that the drought is caused by climate change but the impact of the drought are much worse because of the higher temperatures which cause increased evaporation and higher bushfire danger and that's exactly what we have seen"

Reference: Hodge, A. and Dayton, L. (2003) Drought evidence of global warming. *The Australian* 14-1-03: p.2

From the Mailbag

Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
February 2003

- Ned's Corner Station: a new Trust for Nature property in north-western Victoria
- Birds and Bushfires: effects on plants and wildlife
- BOCA Wet Tropics Tagalong: birdwatching in far north Queensland
- Wilderness in our Backyard: a visit to French Island in Western Port Bay

* * * * * * *

PARK WATCH(VNPA)
March 2003

- Saving a Victorian icon: the River Red Gum forests of northern Victoria
- Croajingolong National Park: revisiting our eastern jewel
- Bogs, Beasts, and bare-ground blues: a look at cattle on the Bogong High Plains

* * * * * * *

Also received recently:

*Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC) March 2003

*Ballarat Naturalist(BFNC) March 2003

*Geelong Naturalist(GFNC) March 2003

*Field Nats News(FNCV) March 2003

* * * * * * *

Viva Argentina (2)

by Tom Burton

We little suspected that Pablo, our host in Argentina was a river rat, but so he proved to be. We were alarmed when he said that he wanted to take us out onto the Paraná River, and visit one of the islands, and especially when he told us that we would have to be prepared to get wet, and maybe covered in mud.

We were even more alarmed when we saw that the boat he proposed to take us in was nothing more than a canoe with an outboard motor attached, with only two seats, so that the smallest (Cherry, fortunately for me) had to sit on a vest on the floor of the canoe, while I sat up front. The paddle on the floor of the canoe was reassuring.

Our fears lasted maybe a minute, when Pablo´s skill at handling the boat became obvious, and we proceeded to enjoy an experience that was the equal of our Yellow Waters (Kakadu) trip in 2001—and with never a crocodile in sight.

Pablo drove us downstream between the closest island and the shore. There are many islands in the Paraná. At that point, the Paraná is 27km wide, but the river is braided into a number of channels, separated by long, narrow islands. We did not go ashore on an island, but Pablo drove the canoe right up onto an island bank, and it was clear that they were very low above the water, made of the finest silt.

Each island appeared heavily vegetated with native willows and dense creepers, but when later we climbed ashore on the river bank, climbed a cliff and looked down on an island, we could see that the trees formed a fringe, while in the centre of the island there was a lagoon surrounded by a flat marshy area.

When Charles Darwin visited the Paraná River, over 170 years ago, he went on long boat trip on the river, and he observed that the islands "undergo a constant round of decay and renovation", that "they are composed of a muddy sand, without even the smallest pebble"—so that has not changed.

What has changed is that in Darwin's day, the "thickets afford[ed] a retreat for capybaras and jaguars". Capybaras are the biggest rodents in the world , big, dopey-looking and tailless. They produce a fine, soft leather with distinctive spots where the tufts of fur emerge. To our question as to whether the Capybara was in any trouble, Pablo pointed out that they breed like rats, and so are safe from danger of extinction.

This made sense, but it had a sad resonance with me, because I had read that when Darwin was in Argentina, the army was engaged in a war of extermination of the Indians, which saddened and angered the idealistic Darwin. When Darwin made the point that the policy of massacring Indian women above the age of twenty was inhuman, a soldier replied, "Why, what can be done? They breed so." I hope that the Capybara does not have the same fate as befell most of the Indian tribes.

Capybaras are still common, but their range does appear to have contracted northwards. Jaguars are no longer to be found in this part of the Paraná, where the thought of encountering jaguar "quite destroyed all [Darwin's] pleasure in scrambling through the woods. ... On every island there were [jaguar] tracks." Darwin tells many stories of jaguar attacks on humans at that time, and still, occasionally, but further north, a jaguar kills somebody. In Misiones, of which more later, near the Brazilian border, warning signs tell you to keep a sharp lookout for the big cats.

A highlight of our ride through Yellow Waters was my first meeting with a Jacana. Well, the Argentinian species of Jacana (pronounced "Hacana" in Spanish) is a much commoner and more widespread bird than the Australian. It has a black body and rusty wings, but when it flies, a patch of bright yellow on the wings makes it look very striking indeed. This is a polyandrous bird. The females fight over males, which look after the eggs and chicks, while the female goes off to mate with another male and lay more eggs. It is surprising to me that this mode of reproductive behaviour is so unusual. It seems as logical and successful a system as the reverse. The Tasmanian Native Hen does this too, but I don't know about the Australian Jacana.

On our boat ride, we saw many birds—Yellow-billed Cardinals, Herons, Green and Amazon Kingfishers, Yellow-billed Tern, Biguá (a dead ringer for our Big Black Cormorant) and many others, and we crept up beside small brown-and-

green frogs as they called from the surface of the brown water, among the floating vegetation, including purple water lilies. Idyllic.

Then Pablo drove us ashore at the base of a cliff, and told us that there were Tertiary (age of dinosaurs) fossils to be found there. It took us a few minutes to get out eyes in, but when we did, discoveries came fast. Most of the fossils were fish scales, but then we started to find fish vertebrae, and at last I found a shark tooth. Remember, we were 500km from the mouth of the river. It turned out that, yes, you guessed, Darwin himself had stopped off at this cliff 170 years ago, and found, among other things, shark teeth. Darwin, as you have also guessed, is a hero of mine, and the realisation that I had found fossils in a place where he did, gave me a gentle thrill.

As a last party trick, Pablo drove the boat upstream of where we were due to make our landing, and turned off the motor. Nothing happened, and we had a pleasant conversation. Then something did happen—something came upstream very fast, and shot past us. As it passed, I realised what it was. It was a stationary buoy—it was we who were moving very fast indeed downstream, without the slightest suspicion that we had moved at all. It led us to wonder at the huge volume of water that must pass down the Paraná River each day.

To finish this episode, I shall go forward to our trip to the Iguazú (Eeg-wah-sue) Falls, in the province of Misiones, on the border of Brazil. Forget Niagara—the Iguazú Falls are many times bigger than that North American icon. The first photograph is shot past the edge of an island, and the Falls extend beyond the other side of that island. In the second photo, taken from higher up, you can see that the Falls extend from just below the platform at the right, all the way around to the left edge of the photo, and beyond.

Photo 1: Iguazú Falls, Argentina

At the top of the Falls is La Garganta del Diablos ("The Devil's Throat"), where the roar is deafening, and you are drenched by spray. It is truly an awe-inspiring, almost frightening, experience to be confronted with such power ... but the swifts that we could see flying in the spray below were untroubled. In fact, they roost and nest behind the roaring curtain of water.

The Iguazú River divides Argentina from Brazil. It is a tributary of the Paraná, which divides Brazil and Argentina from Paraguay. So, not far downstream of the Falls, it is possible to look down on the borders of the three countries.

Next time, more about this north-east corner of Argentina, Misiones, Guarani, hummers, and something about the Andes and the north-west corner.

Reference

Darwin, CR (1906) The Voyage of the Beagle [1860 edition]. JM Dent & Sons: London.

Photo 2: Iguazú Falls, Argentina

Update on Spider Book errata

Jenny Shield has given me an updated version of errata for the recently published book 'Spiders of Bendigo':

Inside front cover: Drawing 2: Swap labels *femur* and *tibia*
Patella refers to the segment between the femur and the tibia

Page 4: 1 January should be 30 January.

Page 28:Photos 65 and 66 are of *Ambicodamus crinitus* L Koch 1872 also text p.49
Photo 67 is *Ambicodamus* sp also text p.49
Page 40: Photo 123 is of *Artoria howquaensis* Framenau 2002 also text p.57
Page 41: Photo 125 and 126 are of *Allocosa palabunda* also text p.57
Photo 127 and 128 are of *Venatrix speciosa* also text p.57

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Guest Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2003
Second Wednesday 8:00 pm

Please check each **WHIRRAKEE** for additional events or changes.
If a workshop is planned, it will start at 7:00pm. The speaker will be introduced at 8:00 pm.
If there is no workshop, the general meeting will start at 7:30pm, with the speaker being introduced at 8:00pm.

Date - 2001	Topic	Speaker
April 9	'Conservation of Native Blackfish' Jon is working on the improvement of river habitat to ensure the survival of these native fish; he is employed at the North Central Catchment Management Authority, Huntly.	Jon Leevers
May 14	'Beauty in Miniature' - An introduction to Lichens and the importance of cryptogams, based on Dr Ralston's research & collection work on Lichens in the field and at the Herbarium.	Kathleen Ralston
June 11	'First impressions of the environment of the Mount Alexander goldfields.' It is sometimes assumed that early European arrivals in this region were uniformly destructive and unappreciative of natural values. Deirdre will explore this assumption by looking at the first impressions of the miner/writers Howitt, Fauchery and Sherer of the goldfields in the 1850s.	Deirdre Slattery
July 9	'Classification of Threatened Fauna in Victoria - definition & assessment of 'Threatened Fauna'; what it means to be on the list.'	Peter Menkhost (Arthur Rylah Institute)
August 13	'Recognition and conservation of sites of geological significance': (examples from the Bendigo region; alpine Australia and the Newer Volcanic Province).	Neville Rosengren
September 10	AGM: 'Ups & downs of BFNC's Conservation campaigns'- A biased and selective Report Card of some of our Club's activities.	
October 8	'Observations of the impact of the recent bushfires in the Victorian Alps & of the process of recovery after the fires.'	Michael Angove *et al.* (La Trobe University)
November 12	'The importance of Environmental Flows in rivers, streams and wetland areas.'	Paul Sinclair (Environment Victoria)
December 10	Christmas Dinner (topic and speaker to be confirmed)	

From page 4: The answer was, "These birds and goannas have co-existed for a long time...it is all a matter of balance...."

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday, April 9 7.30pm
Topic: 'Conservation of Native Blackfish'
The speaker, Jon Leevers, is working on the improvement of river habitat to ensure the survival of these native fish; he is employed at the North Central Catchment Management Authority, Huntly.

Bird Observers Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. The next meeting is on:

Wednesday, April 2 7.30pm
Topic: The Common (Indian) Myna.
Minimise or eradicate? .....continued
Plus, Anne Bridley who has volunteered to contribute to the further development of the 'birds' section of the CD-ROM project may be available to outline her plans and potential discussions.

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. The next meetings are on:

Wednesday, April 23 7.30pm
Echidnas - Glenise and Rob Moors

Wednesday, May 28
Skinks - Darren Green (plus some mystery slides by Rob Watkins)

Excursion June 15
Excursion to check local nest boxes. Contact: Kerrie 54478017 or Maurie 0407 427179.

Wednesday, June 25
Bandicoots - Kerrie Norris

Wednesday, July 23
To be announced

Wednesday, August 27
To be announced

Wednesday, September 2
A.G.M. plus topic of interest to be announced.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

WRIN News

Saturday April 5th,
WRIN will be having the 'bat lady' herself,

Lindy Lumsden coming to Bendigo to give a talk on her favourite subject. The talk will start after the WRIN meeting which **commences at 1pm** and will be at the club rooms.

I'm sure I don't have to write up any details on Lindy, I think you all know her well (and if you don't, come along and meet her...). We will be charging $2 per person to help cover costs. Tea and coffee will be available after the talk